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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 001795

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/10/2019
TAGS: PREL MARR MOPS PINR PGOV KN KS
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR WI SUNG-LAC ON WEST SEA NAVAL INCIDENT

Classified By: Ambassador Stephens. Reasons: 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Ambassador Wi Sung-lac, the ROKG's point person on North Korean issues, gave Ambassador Stephens a readout on the November 10 naval skirmish in the West Sea. Wi said there were no ROK casualties; he could not confirm reports that at least one North Korean was killed and several others wounded. Wi added that the ROK had lodged a protest with the DPRK via military channels urging that such an incident not be repeated and expressing hope that the incident would not negatively affect inter-Korean relations. Separately, USFK Commander General Walter Sharp called Ambassador Stephens to say that USFK and ROK forces have not detected any indications that North Korea is changing its military posture. General Sharp related that the United Nations Command would investigate whether the incident was an armistice violation. End summary.

West Sea Incident

¶2. (C) ROK Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs, Ambassador Wi Sung-lac, called Ambassador Stephens "on instructions" to provide a readout on the November 10 exchange of gunfire between ROK and DPRK navy vessels in the West Sea.

¶3. (C) Wi offered the following chronology of events:

-- At 1122 (local time), a DPRK navy vessel crossed the Northern Limit Line (NLL). A ROK Navy ship issued three warnings to the North Koreans, instructing them to return north of the NLL.

-- At 1136 (local time), the ROK ship fired a warning shot. In response, the DPRK vessel fired 50 shots at the ROK ship. 15 of the shots hit the ROK vessel but caused no serious damage. The ROK ship then fired 100 rounds at the DPRK vessel, which returned north of the NLL. There were no ROK casualties. The ROKG believes there was at least one death and several injuries on the DPRK vessel but cannot confirm that information.

¶4. (C) Wi said the ROK had lodged a protest via military channels urging that such an incident not be repeated by the DPRK and expressing hope that the skirmish would not negatively affect inter-Korean relations. Wi noted that a KCNA statement on the incident was relatively low-key and did not mention casualties, which he said was "positive."

USFK: No Change in North Korean Military Posture

¶5. (C) Separately, USFK Commander General Walter Sharp called Ambassador Stephens to say that USFK has not detected any indications that North Korea is changing its military posture. He said the United Nations Command (UNC) would assess whether the incident was an armistice violation; the UNC would, per normal practice, invite the North Koreans to conduct a joint investigation.

STEPHENS